CHAPTER II

The Matters Relating with the Existence of Man and Universe

II.1 Definition and explanation of the Four Great Elements

In the Pali literature, the mahabhuta (great elements) or catudhatu (four elements) are earth, water, fire and air. In early Buddhism, the Four Elements are a basis for understanding suffering and for liberating oneself from suffering. The Buddha's teaching regarding the four elements is to be understood as the base of all observation of real sensations rather than as a philosophy.

The four great elements are fundamentally empty; the five aggregates do not have true existence is how the Buddha explained of the nature of all events and phenomena of this world and universe after he attained enlightenment. All dharmas exist due to the coming together of the four great elements. What are the four great elements? They are earth, water, fire, and wind. Earth has the property of solidity, water has the property of humidity, fire has the property of heat, and wind has the property of mobility. Why do we say that the four elements of earth, water, fire, and wind are great? Because everything in this world and universe is formed by these four elements. For example, a cup is made by firing clay that is
constructed in the shape of a cup. Clay belongs to the earth element. Water is added to the clay in order to shape the clay into a cup. The cup is then fired. After being fired, the cup is cooled and dried by the wind. So, all four great elements are involved in the formation of this cup.

Similarly, a human being is also formed by the unity of the four great elements. For example, our skin, hair, nails, teeth, bones, and flesh all belong to the earth element. Our blood, saliva, and urine belong to the liquid element. Our body heat belongs to the fire element, and our breathing and movement belong to the wind element. Thus, if any one of these four great elements is out of balance, we will become ill. If these four great elements disintegrate, we will no longer exist.

From these examples, we therefore can see that the physical body is formed by the combination of the four great elements. Furthermore, the mind, or the consciousness according to our usual understanding, is only a combination of the five aggregates—rupa (form), vedana (feeling), samjna (perception), samskara (mental formation), and vijnana (consciousness). Life is the result of the combination of causes and conditions, without a true independent self-nature; a physical body with consciousness is only an existence due to a combination of factors. When the uniting force of these
causes and conditions is exhausted, the previously formed combination of these factors dissolves, and the living being will no longer exist.

The earth element is all those things of the body that have a degree of solidity such as hair, teeth, bones and so on. The water element is any fluids that pertain to the body - urine, saliva, blood, for example. The fire element is the heat within our bodies and the work of the digestive system. The air element is the air that we breathe into our lungs or the air in our bowels, for example.

1. Pathavi, the earth element

The earth element has the fundamental meaning of expansion or breadth, and is thus the aspect or quality of extension. The word is used of the earth, and thus carries also the meaning of solidity, the quality of occupying space with substance.

What is the internal earth element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is solid, solidified and clung to; that is, head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, lungs, large intestines, small intestines, contents of the
stomach, feces, or whatever else internally, belonging to oneself, that is solid, solidified and clung to: this is called the internal earth element.\footnote{M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta,}

The earth element outside oneself can be noted in other living beings, both plant and animal in the same way, and also in inanimate objects. It is to be seen in all solid objects and substances. You will, of course, also find the water element in many of these objects, particularly in the body organs and organic substances: fluid and cohesion in the liver, the tissues of plants, etc. These objects listed as examples of earth are so classed because solidity is their predominant characteristic. By so observing, we see the transience of all things solid, and the continuity between the solid in ourselves and externally.

Now both the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self." When a man sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the earth element, and makes the mind dispassionate toward the earth element.\footnote{M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta}
How might there be lust or attachment for the earth element? Imagine when the earth element is disrupted, as in an earthquake or when our house is destroyed. Here the solidity of our surroundings, even the very ground we walk on, is disturbed or destroyed. Then you will see the powerful underlying attachment to the earth element that we so often take for granted. Such events have great power to shake our sense of security. Still less is there ground for attachment to the earth element internally.

When even this external earth element, great as it is, is seen to be impermanent, subject to destruction, disappearance and change, what of this body, which is clung to by craving and lasts but a while. There can be no considering that as "I" or "mine" or "am".³

By realizing the true nature of the earth element, there cannot be found one's own I'ness or personality or ego (Atta), but only the element of solidity which is ever arising and passing away from growth to decay, from decay to death. In reality, this is not mine; this am I not; this is not my ego, but only the atom of physical phenomena.

³ M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta
2. Apo, the water element

The water element as a technical term means cohesion. It is thus the aspect or quality of fluidity and cohesion - it can carry both of these associated meanings.

What is the internal water element? Whatever internally ... is water, watery, and clung to, that is to say, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, urine, or whatever else internally ... is water, watery, and clung to: this is called the internal water element.\(^4\)

Again, we contemplate the water element in other beings and in inanimate objects. Again, too, we consider disturbance in the water element, so we face flood or drought, so the oceans dry up or rise in their level. Or the soil dries. It cracks. It cannot support life. It loses its cohesion into dust. We also contemplate the impermanence of the water element in ourselves, as the cohesion of the body breaks down after death, the continuity of the water element in ourselves with the water element external to ourselves, and the instability and impermanence of the water element itself. As with the earth element, we can identify our clinging to the water element, and weaken it by these contemplations.

\(^4\) M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta
Now both the internal water element and the external water element are simply water element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self. When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the water element and makes his mind dispassionate towards the water element.\(^5\)

By realizing the true nature of the water element, there cannot be found one's I'ness or personality or ego (Atta), but only the element of fluidity which is ever changing from one form to another. In reality, this is not mine; this am I not; this is not my ego, but this is only the atoms of fluid phenomena.

3. **Tejo, the fire or flame element**

The fire element is related to the idea of sharpness, and is the aspect or quality of heat, of warmth or caloricity or even of energy.

What is the internal fire element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself is fire, fiery, and clung to, that is to say, that by which one is warmed, ages, and is consumed, and that by which what is eaten, drunk, chewed and tasted gets completely digested, or whatever else internally,

\(^5\) M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta
belonging to oneself, is fire, fiery, and clung to: this is called the fire element in oneself.⁶

We can thus contemplate the fire element internally, as we generate heat through the metabolic processes, fuelled by the food we eat. We can also contemplate it externally in other living entities, and recognise our continuity with our environment - we have no separate self. Our craving and clinging to warmth is much easier to recognise than is our clinging to solidity. It does take the form of sensual lust.

It is much harder than in the case of the earth element, to rest deluded in the stability of the fire element. It intensifies into wildfire, volcanic eruption, thermonuclear reactions, both on the earth and in the sun and other stars. It dissipates into states of cold that we find merely uncomfortable, or that we cannot endure. As with the water element, the abundance of the fire element and its dearth threaten our bodily life. So identifying this impermanence (anicca), we can identify the unsatisfactoriness or even the downright pain (both dukkha) of the fire element. In us and outside us it has no stable identity (it is anatta). The

⁶ Ibid
longer-term trend through the fluctuations can be observed internally in increasing sensitivity to cold as we grow older.

By realizing the true nature of the fire element, there cannot be found one's own I'ness or personality or ego (Atta), but only the element of that which is ever warming (usama), digesting (pacaka), decaying (jirana), going up and down of temperature (santappana) and burning (daha). In reality, this is not mine; this am I not; is not my Ego, but this is only the atoms of firing phenomena.

4. Vayo, the air or wind element

The air element has the more fundamental and dynamic meaning of wind, and is thus the aspect or quality of movement or oscillation. The idea of wind remains in this, of course.

What is the internal air element? Whatever internally, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, and clung to, that is to say, up-going winds, down-going winds, winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, winds that course through the limbs, in-breath and out-breath, or whatever in oneself, belonging to oneself, is air, airy, and clung to: this is called internal air element.⁷

⁷ M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta
It is not necessarily nor only the air or substances in gaseous form that are meant - though it is all too easy so to interpret the air element when we read such phrases as, "winds in the belly, winds in the bowels, in-breath and out-breath." The expression, "winds that pervade all the limbs" should quickly put a stop to this construction of the discourse. It is the quality of movement that is common to all of these examples: movement of the air and gases, but also movement of the muscles, even the movement of messages from the brain, the controlling organ, to the body's members. This point is reinforced by the speaker's examples of the disturbance of the external air element, in its overabundance (storm) or in its absence, when air, as we understand the word is clearly present.

There is an occasion when the external air element is disturbed. It sweeps away village, towns, cities, districts and countries. There comes a time in the last month of the hot season when they seek wind by means of a fan or bellows and even the strands of straw in the drip-fringe of the thatch do not stir.\(^8\)

Again as with the fire element or calorific principle, the air element is essentially shifting and dynamic. It is hard to see its manifestations as

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\(^8\) M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta
lasting, although we can delude ourselves about the durance or stability of
the fact of its manifesting. Interestingly, all of this teaching on the
impermanence of the physical elements is consistent with the teachings of
twentieth century physics. Here even matter in whatever form (solid, liquid
or gaseous) is seen at a sub-molecular level and a sub-atomic level as
movement and energy, and there is no known ultimate bedrock level of
physical existence.

Internally, again, the long term trend of the air element can easily
be observed in the signs of our aging, in such things as the weakening of our
ability to move freely, stiffness and pain in the joints, etc.

Some accounts, for example in the Buddha's instructions to his son,
Râhula, about meditation on the body, name a fifth element, space,
indicating hollow spaces or cavities. Internally, this is present in the nostrils,
mouth, lungs and ears; externally space is present in caves, the interior of
buildings and rooms. The meditation on space internally and externally is
done as with the meditation on the other four elements.\(^9\)

By realizing the true nature of the wind element, there cannot be
found one's own I'ness or personality or ego (Atta), but only the element of

\(^9\) Maharahulavada sutta, M. Vol. II. PP. 91-97
vibration which is ever moving, supporting and permeating from place to place. In reality, this is not mine; this am I not, this is not my Ego, but this is only the atoms of vibrating phenomena.

All four of the contemplations of the material elements have the benefit of loosening our attachment to our bodies as lasting, and as constituting a separate self, since we are made of the same constituents and have the same qualities as the animate and inanimate world around us. Moreover, as the Buddha pointed out, we can skill ourselves to let go the perception of ourselves as a being, as a self, and replace this with a perception of ourselves as constituents, aspects and process. This is the point of the Buddha's analogy of the changing viewpoint of a butcher before and after he has cut up the carcass of a cow, from perceiving the cow as a cow, to perceiving it as meat or as merchandise.

Just as if a skilled butcher or his assistant, having slaughtered a cow, were to sit at a crossroads with the carcass divided into portions, so a monk reviews this very body, however it may be placed or disposed, in terms of the element: "There are in this body the earth element, the water element, the fire element, the air element."  

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10 Mahasatipattana sutta, D. Vol. II. PP. 322-323
It is worth noting at this point that the primary elements, as aspects of material existence, are never truly separate, though at any given moment one or more elements might predominate in a living being or in an object. Simply consider what is happening in your own body right at this moment as you are reading, and you will see this.

After you have calmed the body and clarified the mind through meditation on the breath, call to mind some of the body parts mentioned in the text on the meditation on the earth element. See the solidity of the parts, the hardness and mass of particular bones and the teeth and the softer solidity of some of the other parts. Now picture an animal you know, and picture the mass and solidity of the corresponding parts of that being. Now identify the solid element within a plant: the harder woody parts and those parts of softer solidity. Contemplate that. Now contemplate the solidity of the house you are sitting in, of a rock, of some soil, and of the floor or the ground you are sitting on. Sit holding the aspect of solidity in mind. Alternate between contemplating the solidity outside your body and contemplating the solidity within your body. Sense the sameness of solidity wherever it is located. You might if you like, when contemplating the earth element, adopt the earth touching position, with the right hand draped over the right knee or shin, and the fingertips lightly touching the ground you are
sitting on. Now both the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element. \(^{11}\)

Repeat this exercise for the water element in your own body, picturing the shape and cohesiveness of the solid parts and substances, and the fluid quality of blood, lymph, etc. Do this concentrating on your own body, then on the body of an animal, a plant, the building you are in, a rock, and some soil. Even press a handful of moist sand and contemplate the fragile cohesiveness that lets it hold its shape or split into smaller shapes, rather than fall like dry powder. See the one factor of fluidity and cohesion as common to all. Now both the internal water element and the external water element are simply water element. \(^{12}\)

Contemplate the heat in your own body. Ponder the latent energy stored in the food you eat, the digestive processes, which extract the energy from the food, the absorption of the sugars and other substances from the digestive tract, and the burning of the sugars in the body cells. Notice the temperature of the body surface as you sit meditation, and as you meditate walking. Notice this also as you go about your daily tasks. Contemplate these phenomena in an animal you know. Contemplate the higher body

\(^{11}\) M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta
\(^{12}\) M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta
temperature of a dog or a bird. Contemplate the heat stored in the soil, in rocks, or in the walls of a house. See this all as the heat element. Now both the internal fire element and the external fire element are simply fire element.  

Contemplate the movements in your own body: the beating of the heart and the response in the flow of blood and in the walls of the blood vessels; the voluntary movements you make in chewing your food and swallowing, the autonomic movements of your digestive organs in digesting, ingesting, and propelling the matter through; the slower movements of the lymph, propelled by incidental use of muscles; the movements of messages from the brain, and the response of muscle groups in voluntary actions; the movements of the body in response to forces from outside, such as strong wind. Contemplate these same actions in the body of an animal you know. Contemplate the movements in nature: the movements of plants as they grow or as they adjust to the position of the sun or as they bend, resist and spring back under the influence of the wind; the movement of the wind itself and of water in its various forms; the movements, sometimes catastrophic, of the earth, the creep of soil, the slow movement of tectonic plates, the sudden release of pressures in earthquakes and volcanoes. See these all as the

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common element of movement. Now both the internal air element and the external air element are simply air element.¹⁴

Contemplate rise and fall of these elements in the body as you change positions: how the earth element is strongest when standing or sitting, and somewhat less when the muscles relax when lying down; how the heat changes with exercise or rest; how the air element is strongest when walking or running; how the strength of the elements relative to each other changes during an action - for example, when walking, solidity predominates as the foot is planted and air is strongest as the foot is swung forwards. Contemplate these same changes in the walking or running of animals, the flight of birds, in the movements of plants and the inanimate matter and objects; observe the changes in the air, the water, and the soil through the course of the day and the cycle of the seasons. See these processes of change in materiality in common between your body and both living and inanimate objects in your surroundings. You can do these contemplations during your meditation, through visualisation during sitting meditation, through concentration on the action of walking. You can also contemplate so during your daily activities, when handling the soil in gardening, when a bird flies overhead, and so on. Use events in this way in

¹⁴ M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta
the moment they occur. And each element should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self." ¹⁵

By taking the whole view of the physical phenomena to one-pointedness, one should understand, discern and realize that the body composed of hairs, bones, teeth, blood, sweat, wind etc, is nothing, but the particles or atoms of these four primary phenomenal element which are forever and ever arising and passing away without any stop even a very short moment.

Being so, the so-called body named such and such with a conventional term is, in the sense of ultimate reality merely proton, neutron and electron of physical phenomena, but not infinite soul; nor mine; nor am I, nor my personality nor ego or self.

Regarding the mind, there is no place where mind can be located. Evidently mind is not static thing, but a moving phenomenon. It is therefore, in reality, the process of consciousness arisen between sense organs and objects. When mind comes in contact with an object through any one of six sense-doors, a new mental phenomenon or consciousness arises and

¹⁵ M. Vol. I. PP. 230-237 - Mahahatthipadopama sutta
immediately it passes away. Even during such a very short moment of consciousness, the mental process has happened many times very swiftly. So the comprehensive discernment of physical and mental phenomena in its real nature is called (Vipassana Ñana) Insight knowledge.

By realizing the true nature of the ultimate reality, one in able to be contented; contentment leads to lesser and lesser desire for sensual pleasure, from lesser desire to delight, then to rapture, absolute purity, happiness, onepointedness of the mind, discernment in insight as it really is, banefulness in craving, will for emancipation from craving, realization of insight in absolute emancipation and then finally leads to the attainment of Ultimate Peaceful Happiness of Nibbana.

II.2. Definition and explanation of the Five Aggregates

One of the most central to the Buddha’s teaching was the khandhas, which are most frequently translated into English as "aggregates." Prior to the Buddha, the Pali word khandha had very ordinary meanings: A khandha could be a pile, a bundle, a heap, a mass. It could also be the trunk of a tree. In his first sermon, though, the Buddha gave it a new, psychological meaning, introducing the term "clinging-khandhas" to summarize his analysis of the truth of stress and suffering. Throughout the remainder of his
teaching career, he referred to these psychological khandhas time and again. Their importance in his teachings has thus been obvious to every generation of Buddhists ever since.

Why are they called aggregates, khandha? Khandha means "heap" or "accumulation." It is easy to understand that the body is a heap of material elements. We maintain its process of growth by heaping it up with gross material food. In the mental sphere, too, through our experiences we accumulate feelings, perceptions and ideas, volitions, and consciousness. Therefore all five aspects of the personality are called heaps, accumulations, or aggregates. Since they are intimately interconnected and act on one another, the processes are extremely complex and complicated. According to one commentarial simile they are like the waters at a confluence where five rivers meet. One cannot take a handful of water and say that it came from such and such a river. The aggregates are ever-changing and are constantly in a state of flux.

The word aggregate means a collection, thus each aggregate is a collection of many components. The components of one aggregate may be different types of phenomena, such as love and anger, or they may be different possibilities of one phenomenon, such as the feeling of different
levels of happiness. When part of experience, each variable component changes from moment to moment and has a different length of continuity.

The five aggregate factors, then, resemble five bags. Each moment of our experience has one or more components from each of the bags, and every variable that constitutes our experience is in one or another of the bags. The bags, however, are merely abstractions imputed on the basis of collections of components. The bags and their components do not exist on their own somewhere, either inside or outside of us. When an aggregate factor, such as happiness or anger, is not part of our experience of the moment, it does not exist as something findable somewhere else. We do not see the five aggregates as phenomena but as an entity because of our deluded minds, because of or innate desire to treat these as a self in order to pander to our self-importance. Then we will not mistake the superficial for the real. We will then see that these aggregates arise and disappear in rapid succession, never being the same for two consecutive moments, never static but always in a state of flux, never being but always becoming. If the five aggregates and all the other things are conditioned and interdependent, there should also be no free will. With this Conditioned Genesis together with the analysis of the Five Aggregates, one finds that there is also no immortal abiding essence in man. Whether this essence is called Atman or soul it does
not matter. This is the Buddhist doctrine of Anatta, No-Soul or No-Self. In conventional truth or daily conversation we use the word “I” merely to signify an individual separate from other individuals. However in ultimate truth there is no essence or abiding substance behind this individual. ‘A person should be mentioned as existing only in designation, but not in reality.’ The Buddha said:

All created things are transitory;
Those who realize this are freed from suffering.
This is the path that leads to wisdom.

All created things are involved in sorrow;
Those who realize this are freed from suffering.
This is the path that leads to pure wisdom.

All states are without self;
Those who realize this are freed from suffering.
This is the path that leads to pure wisdom.\(^{16}\)

All created things are impermanent and therefore involved in dukkha, sorrow and suffering. There is no Self or Atman in the Five Aggregates or outside the Five Aggregates. Furthermore, there is also no Self or Atman in the unconditioned. For those the Five Aggregates work

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\(^{16}\) Dhp. pp, 277, 278, 279
interdependently in a constant flux within the law of cause and effect, and that there is no eternal, unchanging, and permanent essence in all conditioned and unconditioned things and states.

The five aggregates constitute a real private prison for us. We suffer a great deal due to our attachment to this prison and our expectations of what the prison should be. As our perception of the external world and our relations with our fellow human beings are conditioned by the nature of this prison, interpersonal relations and communication become extremely complex, tricky, and problematic. Problems become more and more complicated to the extent that we identify ourselves with this private prison.

Now let us try to supplement our understanding of the canonical teachings in terms of our daily experience and see how we cling to each and every one of these aggregates as "I" and "mine," and continue to suffer in the private prison that we make for ourselves.

Understanding of the five khandhas or Aggregates plays a big part in Buddhism. These five khandhas, viewed in another way, can be divided into Mind and Matter, or rather, Mentality and Materiality.
Whenever Consciousness arises, there arise also the Feeling Aggregate and the Perception Aggregate and the Mental Formations Aggregate. These are the four Mental Aggregates. The Matter Aggregate is generated simultaneously by the four generators, viz., Karma, Consciousness, Temperature and Nutriment. This makes up the five Aggregates.

These five Aggregates come from nowhere and go to nowhere. They just arise and disappear. This concept is very important in Buddhist Meditation. The five Aggregates are evanescent. They just flash forth and disappear.

One Mind succeeds another; the five Aggregates arise and disappear immediately. Consciousness can arise through any of the six Doors. The five Aggregates that arise from the Eye Door are different in kind to the five Aggregates that arise through the Ear-Door, and again are different in kind to the aggregates that arise through the Nose-Door, etc.

It is all automatic. It will be seen that the "I" or self does not enter into the picture at all. However, the Mind-Consciousness, which is the Big Magician, brings in the ideas of "I" and Mine and Myself, and therefore there is attachment to these five khandhas.
We have seen how these five khandhas arise and how they disappear immediately - arising and cessation, and once again arising and cessation, and so on. They just flash forth when the conditions are fulfilled and immediately disappear; they are evanescent.

What is called individual existence is in reality nothing but a mere process of those mental and physical phenomena, a process that since time immemorial has been going on, and that also after death will still continue for unthinkably long periods of time. These five groups, however, neither singly nor collectively constitute any self-dependent real ego-entity, or personality (attā), nor is there to be found any such entity apart from them. Hence the belief in such an ego-entity or personality, as real in the ultimate sense, proves a mere illusion.

The fact ought to be emphasised here that these five groups, correctly speaking, merely form an abstract classification by the Buddha, but that they as such, i.e. as just these five complete groups, have no real existence, since only single representatives of these groups, mostly variable, can arise with any state of consciousness. For example, with one and the same unit of consciousness only one single kind of feeling, say joy or sorrow, can be associated and never more than one. Similarly, two different
perceptions cannot arise at the same moment. Also, of the various kinds of sense-cognition or consciousness, only one can be present at a time, for example, seeing, hearing or inner consciousness, etc. However, a smaller or larger number are always associated with every state of consciousness, as we shall see later on.

Some writers on Buddhism who have not understood that the five khandha are just classificatory groupings, have conceived them as compact entities (‘heaps’, ‘bundles’), while actually, as stated above, the groups never exist as such, i.e. they never occur in a simultaneous totality of all their constituents. Also those single constituents of a group which are present in any given body- and -mind process are of an evanescent nature, and so also their varying combinations. Feeling, perception and mental formations form merely the various different aspects and functions of those single units of consciousness which, like lightning, flash forth at every moment and immediately there after disappear again for ever. They are to consciousness what redness, softness, sweetness, etc. are to an apple and have as little separate existence as those qualities.

In Samyutta- Nikaya there is the following short definition of these five groups:
"What, o monks, is the Aggregate of Matter? The four primary elements (mahā-bhūta or dhātu) and corporeality depending thereon, this is called the Aggregate of Matter.

"What, o monks, is the Aggregate of Sensation? There are six classes of feeling: due to visual impression, to sound impression, to odour impression, to taste impression, to bodily impression, and to mind impression....

"What, o monks, is the Aggregate of Perceptions? There are six classes of perception: perception of visual objects, of sounds, of odours, of tastes, of bodily impressions, and of mental impressions....

"What, o monks, is the Aggregate of Mental Formations? There are six classes of volitional states (cetanā): with regard to visual objects, to sounds, to odours, to tastes, to bodily impressions and to mind objects....

"What, o monks, is the Aggregate of Consciousness? There are six classes of consciousness: eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, nose-consciousness, tongue-consciousness, body-consciousness, and mind-consciousness."17

About the inseparability of the groups it is said:

"Whatever, o brother, there exists of feeling, of perception and of mental formations, these things are associated, not dissociated, and it is impossible to separate one from the other and show their difference. For whatever one feels, one perceives; and whatever one perceives, of this one is conscious" 18

Further: "Impossible is it for anyone to explain the passing out of one existence and the entering into a new existence, or the growth, increase and development of consciousness independent of corporeality, feeling, perception and mental formations" 19

Regarding the impersonality (anattā) and emptiness (suññatā) of the five groups, it is said in Samyutta Nikaya:

"Whatever there is of corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness, whether past, present or future, one’s own or external, gross or subtle, lofty or low, far or near, this one should understand

18 M. Vol I. PP. 350-360
19 S. II, p, 60.
according to reality and true wisdom: 'This does not belong to me, this am I not, this is not my Ego.'”\textsuperscript{20}

Further also in Samyutta Nikaya: "Suppose that a man who is not blind were to behold the many bubbles on the Ganges as they are driving along; and he should watch them and carefully examine them. After carefully examining them, however, they will appear to him empty, unreal and unsubstantial. In exactly the same way does the monk behold all the corporeal phenomena ... feelings ... perceptions ... mental formations ... states of consciousness, whether they be of the past, present or future ... far or near. And he watches them and examines them carefully; and after carefully examining them, they appear to him empty, unreal and unsubstantial."\textsuperscript{21}

The five groups are compared, respectively, to a lump of froth, a bubble, a mirage, a core less plantain stem, and a conjuring trick.\textsuperscript{22}

The teaching of The Five Aggregates is an analysis of personal experiences and a view on cognition from a Buddhist perspective. It also provides a logical and thorough approach to understand the Universal Truth

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\textsuperscript{20} S. Vol. III, PP, 42,43.\\ 
\textsuperscript{21} S.Vol. III, pp, 119.\\ 
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid
\end{flushright}
of Not-self. Self is just a convenient term for a collection of physical and mental personal experiences, thus each aggregate is a collection of many components. The components of one aggregate may be different types of phenomena, such as love and anger, or they may be different possibilities of one phenomenon, such as the feeling of different levels of happiness. When part of experience, each variable component changes from moment to moment and has a different length of continuity.

II.3. Definition and explanation of Six Great Elements

The entire universe and all living beings are made of six elements, namely, Earth, Water, Fire, Air, Space and Consciousness. All solid matters are belonged to Earth; all liquid and wet matters are belonged to Water; all matters related to light and heat energy are belonged to Fire; all gaseous matters are belonged to Air; all distance or interval amongst matters are belonged to Space; all senses and spiritual activities are belonged to Consciousness. The first five elements are classified as Form Dharma, while the sixth one is the Mind Dharma.

The Six Great Elements is the substance of all Dharmas, which can produce all Buddhas, all living beings and the material world. It should be noted that the Six Great Elements are inherent within the ordinary nature of
all sentient being. When they are in a static state, it is the substance of true reality; when they are in dynamic state, they are revealed as the 'source' of all forms and phenomena. In denying the metaphysical and empirical theories of self (aatman), the Buddha analyses human existence or personality into six elements (cha-dhaatu)\textsuperscript{23}. Six elements are the earth-element (pa.thavii / p.rthivii-dhaatu), water-element (aapo / aap-dhaatu), fire-element (tejo-dhaatu), air-element (vaayo / vaayu-dhaatu), space-element (aakaasa-dhaatu) and the consciousness-element (vi~n~na.na-dhaatu). Of these, the first four are called great elements (mahaabhuuta), as in the case of ruupakkhandha of five personality factors (pa~ncakkhandha). The main difference between this analysis and five personality-factors analysis is that in the latter more emphasis is laid on the psychological aspect while in the former, on physical aspect, of a living being. The purpose behind these analyses is that while the former aims at refuting an eternalist theory of self, the latter, a materialist view of human personality. These elements represent both the factual phenomena and the world of experience relating to it, which a being can have. They are distinguished in two forms, namely, internal (ajjhattika) referable to human body and external (baahira) referable to the physical world.

\textsuperscript{23} M. Vol. III.,239;A.I.175
1. The earth-element (pa.thavii-dhaatu). This element first represents the fact of extension, rigidity or hardness in matter or of/in a human body, then the experience of roughness and solidity, etc.\textsuperscript{24}. Referable to human body, it is internal including hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow of the bones, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs, intestine, mesentery, stomach, excrement, etc.\textsuperscript{25}. Having extension (pattha.tattaa pa.thavii) as its characteristic, this element becomes the ground or support of the other three elements (i.e. water, air and fire)\textsuperscript{26}.

2. Water-element (aapo-dhaatu). This element represents the fact of fluidity or viscidity, and the experience of cohesion or binding together in matter (bandhanattaa, aabandha-dhaatu, sa"ngraha) or in human body\textsuperscript{27}. As to it is referable to human body is concerned, it consists of bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, serum, saliva, mucus, synovial fluid, urine or whatever other thing is liquid or fluid\textsuperscript{28}.

3. Fire-element (tejo-dhaatu). This element represents the fact of heat or warmth, and the sensation on temperature of heat and cold in general. It is described as that by which one is vitalized, consumed, burnt up, and that

\textsuperscript{24} M. Vol. III.240.cf.Dhs.177;Vbh.62,82
\textsuperscript{25} M. Vol. III.240
\textsuperscript{26} Vism.306
\textsuperscript{27} M. Vol. III.241.cf.Dhs.177;Vbh,83
\textsuperscript{28} M. Vol. III.241
which one has munched, drunk, eaten and tasted which is properly transformed in digestion. As a supplier of heat or temperature, it functions as ripening or maturing (paripaacana / pakti)\textsuperscript{29}.

4. Air-element (vaayo-dhaatu). This element represents the fact of motion or mobility (thambhitatta) of the body and inside the body such as winds going upwards, downwards, winds in the abdomen, in the belly, winds that shoot across the limbs, the in-breathing and out-breathing, and whatever in motion referable to the body\textsuperscript{30}. Having motion and distension as its characteristics, vaayo-dhaatu happens to be the supply of strength to the body giving rise the feeling of smooth mobility to a living beings.

5. Space-element (aakaasa-dhaatu). This element represents the fact of delimited space, such as holes, apertures, interstices, etc. As regards human body is concerned, it is the space between or lack of ruupa, a visible or bounded space, such as the auditory and nasal orifices, the door of mouth and that by which one swallows what is munched, drunk, eaten and tasted, and where this remains, and where it passed out of the body lower down \textsuperscript{31}. Referable to the external world, it is both delimited space and empty space or invisible space. Buddhaghosa remarks that it is dependent on or

\textsuperscript{29} M.Vol. III.241.Cf.Vbh.63
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid
\textsuperscript{31} M. Vol. III.241-2
established by (*vyavasthaapitaa*) or manifested as the confines of matters (*ruupa-mariyaada-paccupa.t.thaanaa*) and that it has its proximate cause in matter delimited by it\(^{32}\). Unlike the scientists admitting space as absolute and unconditioned, the Buddha recognizes the conditionality of space, for the experience of space is dependent on the experience of material bodies.

6. Consciousness-element (*vi~n~naa.na-dhaatu*). This element represents psychological and rational functions of sentient beings as opposed to the first five inanimate elements. Only with this element, man is a rational and thinking being, discriminating facts and value, such as pleasure, pain and indifference. This follows that a variety of feelings and experiences arises\(^{33}\). This conscious element, therefore, stands for four psychological personality factors, viz., feeling, perception, disposition and sixfold perceptual consciousness.

Of these, the first five elements constitute the physical body of living beings as well as the material world, whereas, the consciousness-element constitutes mental faculty or intellect of living beings. The universe is made of four great elements and space, whilst mankind and other sentient beings of all these five plus consciousness. As to sentient beings,

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\(^{32}\) Vism.379

\(^{33}\) M.Vol. III.241-3
consciousness-element, as the most important factor, by which he is recognized as conscious being and differentiated from matter and inanimate things.

In the same manner, O Prince, when this body is associated with vitality, heat and consciousness, it can perform the action of walking, standing, sitting, lying down, seeing the visible with eyes, hearing sound with ears, smelling smells with noses, tasting flavours with tongue, touching the tangible with body and knowing objects and ideas with mind (mano)\textsuperscript{34}.

It is therefore superior to the other five, as the canonical passage runs as follows:

“Consciousness is unextended, infinite and radiant all around. In it neither water, nor earth, nor fire, nor air can find a place. In it, length, shortness, subtlety, coarseness, beauty, ugliness and name-and-form cease completely. When consciousness ceases, all things ceases.”\textsuperscript{35}

These six psycho-physical factors serve as the ground for conception in the process of rebirth: "based on these six elements, there is descent into the womb. This descent taking place, psycho-physical

\textsuperscript{34} D. Vol. II.338
\textsuperscript{35} D.Vol. I.223
personality (*naamaruupa*) comes to pass. Conditioned by psycho-physical personality is six sense organs. Conditioned by six sense organs is contact. Conditioned by contact is feeling . . ."³⁶.

The six elements are, in fact, not substantial entities subject to no-change and permanence. Like the psycho-physical personality (*naamaruupa*) and fivefold personality factors (*pa~ncakkhandha*), none of these elements is considered as an eternal and substantial soul/ self/ life-principle. The Buddha teaches us that each of these elements should be seen as it really is, thus "this is not mine (*netaa mama*), this I am not (*neso aham asmi*), and this is not myself (*nam eso attaa*)"³⁷.

**II.4. Definition and explanation of Twelve spheres**

*Aayatana* literally means place, sphere, or gateway of meeting, place of birth or production. It is also known as the locus, ground, or source for happening. In Buddhist terminology, it stands for the sphere, ground, gateway, or locus of meeting between the six sense-organs and their corresponding objects. Vasubandhu renders it as the gate of production of the *citta* and *cetasika dhamma*³⁸. These are the gateway of sense experience

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³⁶ A. Vol. I.P. 175  
³⁷ M.Vol. III.PP. 241-4  
³⁸ W.M.McGovern(1979):95
or the ground for bringing about consciousness. The twelve spheres (aayatana) consist of the six sense-organs and their corresponding six-data or objects. The six sense-organs are eye (cakkhu), ear (sota), nose (ghaana), tongue (jivhaa), body (kaaya) and mind (mano). Their corresponding six sense-objects are form (ruupa), sound (sadda), smell (gandha), taste (rasa), tangible (pho.t.thabba) and concepts (dhammaa).

Each of these sense-spheres includes both the sense organ and the sense object. Besides the five physical senses (eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) and their respective objects (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch), the mind is included as the sixth sense. Mind represents mainly the activity of thoughts, such as reasoning, memory, and reflection. Thus all perceptual processes rely to some extent on the interpretive processes of the mind, since it “makes sense” out of the other spheres. The importance of contemplation of the sense-spheres is that it directs awareness to the six “internal” and “external” sense-spheres and the fetters (samyojana) arising in dependence on them. All our experience is limited to the senses and their objects, with the mind counted as the sixth. The five outer senses collect data only in the present but mind, the sixth, where this information is collected and processed, adds memories from the past and hopes and fears for the future as

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well as thoughts of various kinds relating to the present. Beyond these six bases of sense and their corresponding six objective bases, we know nothing.

By investigating the twelve sensory spheres and learning to simplify our view, we can dismantle the diversity of our mental proliferations into these twelve spheres. Instead of seeing a manifold world of particular things, we can simplify our seeing. There is just the eye and the form sensory sphere. All that we ever see is simply the form sensory sphere. Everything else is added by our conditioned perspective. The same is true for the remaining pairs of sensory spheres. The Buddha called these twelve sensory spheres “the all.”

And what, monks, is the all? The eye and forms, the ear and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and flavors, the body and tactual objects, the mind and phenomena. This is called the all\(^{40}\). The Buddha exhorts us to go even further than just understanding and accepting this all. We are to develop dispassion towards the all and abandon it. Without doing so we will find ourselves incapable of eliminating dissatisfaction.

\(^{40}\) S. Vol. IV. P, 8. The All. 35.23
II.5. Definition and explanation of Eighteen Realms

*Dhaatu* is that which bears its own characteristics or intrinsic nature (*attano sabhaavam dhaarentiiti dhaatuyo*)\(^{41}\). According to Vasubandhu, the term means species, realms, component, genus or clan (*dhaatu.hgotraartha.h*) or element\(^{42}\). This means that each *dhaatu* bears its own nature and no *dhaatu* bear the same nature. The eighteen elements (*a.t.thaarasa dhaatu*) are nothing but twelve spheres plus their corresponding six resultant cognitions or consciousnesses (*vi~n~naa.na*)\(^{43}\), which arise out of the contact between the six sense-organs and their corresponding six sense-data or objects. The six sense-organs are called internal bases (*ajjhattika-aayatana*). The six sense-data or objects are called external bases (*baahira-aayatana*). The six resultant consciousnesses (*vi~n~naa.na*) are visual consciousness (*cakkhu-vi~n~naa.na*), auditory consciousness (*sota-vi~n~naa.na*), olfactory consciousness (*ghaana-vi~n~naa.na*), gustatory consciousness (*jivhaa-vi~n~naa.na*), tactile consciousness (*kaaya-vi~n~naa.na*) and mental consciousness (*mano-vi~n~naa.na*).

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\(^{41}\) Vism.P.411
\(^{42}\) Ko'sa.V.33.cf.W.M.McGoern (1979):95
\(^{43}\) S.Vol. II.140.cf.M.Vol.I.PP. 259-60
The eighteen Realms are listed in Bahudhātuka Sutta:

There are, Ānanda, these eighteen components: the eye component, the form component, the eye-consciousness component; the ear component, the sound component, the ear-consciousness component; the nose component, the odor component, the nose-consciousness component; the tongue component, the flavor component, the tongue-consciousness component; the body component, the tactual object component, the body-consciousness component; the mind component, the phenomena component, the mind-consciousness component. When he knows and sees these eighteen components, a monk can be called ‘skilled in the components.’

These eighteen realms are listed in the following table.

The Eighteen Realms (Dhātus)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Six External Bases</th>
<th>Six Internal Bases</th>
<th>Six Consciousnesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(bāhya-āyatana)</td>
<td>(adhyātma-āyatana)</td>
<td>(vijñāna)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Visual Objects (rūpa-</td>
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<td>āyatana)</td>
<td>(2) Eye Faculty</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(cakkhur-indriya-āyatana)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(3) Visual Consciousness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(cakkhur-vijñāna)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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44 M.Vol. I. P. 115 Bahudhātuka Sutta
Like the Five Skandhas, the Eighteen Realms are a way of analyzing the entire psycho-physical world as an aid to breaking attachments to it. Everything that we experience is included in the Eighteen Realms. The first five or the Six Objects include the entire external world. The first five
of the Six Organs describe our physical bodies. Together they comprise the entire physical world. The mind organ, dharmas as objects of mind, and the Six Consciousnesses comprise the world of mind. All mental experience is included within them. Since both mental and physical worlds are completely included, there is no need for recourse to a real, permanent self or soul to describe any experience.

According to the teachings of the Mahayana, all dharmas are empty of any real, permanent, inherent identifying characteristics. Therefore, in emptiness there are no eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body or mind; no sights, sounds, smells, tastes, objects of touch or dharmas; no field of the eyes, up to and including no field of mind-consciousness.